

# Human Side

A Department from the Department of Human Services



December January February 2005

## Department of Human Services (DHS) Employees of the Year 2004

### Joint-Winners Direct Services—Para-Professional



Michelle McKnight  
Neighborhood Assistance Bureau  
Edison Neighborhood Center  
Secretary

Ms. McKnight began her career with DHS in 1982 at the Culmer Neighborhood Center. She is a proud mother of two beautiful children, Portia, age 21, a senior and honor student at Florida A & M University, and Kennard, age 18, who is a freshman at Florida A & M University. She attends the Church of God of North Dade serving as church secretary, assists with the children's ministry and sings in the choir. Ms. McKnight's motto for her children is in order to be successful you must seek God's agape love and remember that he will add the increase. Never give up on your dreams and vision, obtain all the knowledge you can and always remember that nothing beats a failure but a try.

Michelle truly loves spending time with family and friends which instill the importance of treating all mankind with love and respect. In her spare time, she enjoys playing racquetball and bowling.



Pamela M. Witter  
Child Development Services  
Eligibility Services Unit  
Eligibility Interviewer

As a child, Ms. Witter migrated with her family from Jamaica, West Indies to New York City, attending Elementary and High School there. In the late 1970's, she moved to South Florida, for the warm climate. Ms. Witter is a proud mother of six children. Two of which are graduates from the University of Florida. The oldest received a masters degree, graduating magna cum laude from Georgia State University, and the other will be attending Law school in January 2005.

Her career with Miami Dade County started as a temporary worker. Three years later, she became an Eligibility Interviewer, and in the summer of 2004, was promoted to Family Service Worker. During her years with DHS, she has experienced differing personalities, allowing her to laugh, cry, be inspired, and form lasting friendships, which has nurtured her to grow and develop. Her strong belief and love of God has motivated her to be the best at whatever endeavor she undertakes, and gives Him all the credit and glory.

### Winner Direct Services—Professional



Ali Medel  
Office of Rehabilitative Services  
Central Intake Unit  
Social Worker I

Ms. Medel was born in Waterbury, Connecticut, and at the age of eight the family moved to Miami, Florida. She attended Corpus Christi Private School through eight grade; Miami Jackson Senior High School Class of 1989; Miami-Dade Community College, Wolfson/Kendall Campus receiving an AA in Psychology, and graduated from Florida International University with a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology. During college, she volunteered at Switchboard of Miami as a crisis counselor and worked part-time as an Administrative Assistant. Once she received her BA, she began her career with the State of Florida Health Care Administration in 1995, as a Medicaid/Medipass Counselor. In 1997, she became a Miami-Dade County employee starting at the H.A.R.T. Program and married her husband that same year. In 1998, her first son was born and in 1999, her second son was born. As of 1998, she has been with the Housing Employment Program.

She dedicates time to her children by being their homework and reading buddy. She also enjoys shopping, music, books, home cookouts and dining, walks to the lake, park and movies with the family.

# Director's Message



In October 1997, I joined the Department of Human Services as your Director. Over the past seven years, I have been associated with exceptional professionals and committed staff in the human services arena. Since that time, major changes have taken place in how the Department operates, such as, the administrative roll-up which included financial, procurement, personnel and administrative areas, the consolidation of program functions, the recapture by Child Development Services of the full Dade County administration for child care, the development of the first Social Services Master Plan, and, of course, the Department's accreditation with the Council on Accreditation.

Over the years, I want to thank everyone for their loyal support and flexibility in special project participation such as storm recovery, building condemnations, Habitat for Humanity, Elections, United Way, the Bond Issue, and DHS beautification projects. All our projects have been undertaken with a sense of pride and compassion, and everyone can be proud of their efforts.

Effective January 1, 2005, after 32 years with Miami Dade County government, I will be retiring. I have thoroughly enjoy my tenure with Miami Dade, I want to wish everyone a joyous and prosperous new year.

The County Manager has appointed Mae D. Bryant, Ph.D your Interim Director. Dr. Bryant has been with the Department of Human Services in various management capacities since 1985 that include Assistant Director since 1994, the Director of Office of Rehabilitative Services (ORS), and Assistant Director, Office of Emergency Assistance. Before joining Miami-Dade, Dr. Bryant worked 16 years with the State of Florida, Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services (now known as Dept. of Children and Families) in various administrative, program development and planning areas. She holds a Doctorate in Philosophy and a Masters of Science in Human Services from Nova Southeastern University, and a Bachelors of Arts in Sociology, from Florida A & M University.

I know this is a great honor for Dr. Bryant on her appointment as the Interim Director of DHS by the County Manager, and know that everyone will give her their congratulations and full support.

Dean Taylor, Sr.

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***The Human Side***

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County Attorney

## Department of Human Services Employees of the Year (Con't)

### Winner In-Direct Services—Para Professional



Beverly Mitchell  
Office of Rehabilitative Services  
TASC Division and Treatment  
Model Cities  
Office Support Specialist

Ms. Mitchell was born and raised in New Rochelle, New York in a family of five siblings. After High School, she worked for the New Rochelle Hospital's Dietary Department, and after four years decided to continue her education by attending State University at Purchase, New York. She worked for Lillian Vernon Corporation in New Rochelle before coming to Miami. In Miami, Beverly began working for H & R Block and various temporary agencies. For approximately two and one half years, she worked at the Office of Rehabilitative Services, Aftercare Treatment Program as a temporary, until her transfer to the Diversion and Treatment Program, North, Model Cities, where on February 26, 2001, she became a permanent Miami Dade County employee.

Ms. Mitchell is a volunteer Goodwill Ambassador and on the Response Team through the Office of Community Relations. She has volunteered with the Miami-Dade Transit Transportation Plan, worked with the American Red Cross serving hot meals, and the Internal Revenue Services' Vital Tax Program as a tax preparer.

She is an ordained Evangelist and an active member of the Bible Teachers International Ministries of Miami. She enjoys church bible studies, traveling, handcrafting, reading, jigsaw puzzles, singing, music and experimenting with recipes. She has recently completed the Certified Professional Secretarial Course offered by Miami Dade County University.

### Winner In Direct Services—Professional



Ed Nelson  
Employment Services Bureau  
Cuban Haitian  
Refugee Initiative  
Social Services Supervisor

Ed Nelson, LCSW, was born in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, where he completed his Bachelor of Sciences majoring in Education, from 'Ecole Normale Superieure'. He is a Barry University alumnus where he completed graduate studies in Social Work. Prior to immigrating to the United States, as a young man, Ed went to teach in Africa; an experience he continues to cherish and refer to as one of the most rewarding of his professional career. He primarily settled in New York State, where he started his career in the field of Social Work at Hillcrest Center for Children in Bedford Hills, NY. Mr. Nelson moved to Miami in 1977, working at Miami Children's Hospital, Jackson Hospital and the Office of Refugee Resettlement at the Krome Avenue Camp.

He joined Miami Dade County in 1991, working for the Community Action Agency's Project T.I.P.P., a site of the federal Comprehensive Child Development Initiative. Subsequently, he joined the Office of Family Development's Family Builders Program as a Clinical Social Worker. He is currently a supervisor at the Haitian Youth /Refugee Services Program in Little Haiti, a component of the Employment Services Bureau. Ed is a proud father of three children and a grandfather.

## Department's New WMBM Radio Show

The Department of Human Services, in partnership with Florida National College, has a new radio show on WMBM called "The Human Side". Co-hosted by Rachel Tourgeman, DHS Community Relations Director and LaVard Wright, Miami Dade Transit Agency, the show is an informative talk show highlighting the programs offered by DHS, and the degrees and course work offered by Florida National College. Beginning February 2005, the show will air every fourth Monday and Tuesday of the month from 2:00 to 3:00 p.m. Plans are to schedule two half hour interviews per show. Call-ins are welcome at (305) 953-9626. Pictured below Mr. Dean Taylor, Sr., former Director, presented with a generous check from Mr. and Mrs. Reguiero, owners of Florida National College, in an effort to support DHS initiatives. Also pictured is Rachel Tourgeman, LaVard Wright, and Dean Taylor, Sr. in the studio at WMBM.



## Team of the Year Winners



### **Delinquency Prevention Services Miami Dade County Role Models Team**

Angel Valdes  
Paul Black

The Miami Dade County Role Models Team provides the opportunity for diverted male juvenile offenders to interact with positive adult role models who introduce them to a variety of cultural, recreational and educational experiences. The team combined has over 40 years of experience in the social work arena, and is extremely resourceful in obtaining donated items and services for their clients. These gentlemen have excellent rapport with their young clients, and conduct group sessions dealing with self-esteem, conflict resolution and other pertinent issues affecting today's youth. In an effort to expose the youth to other positive role models, the team has recruited committed adults from the community which include local sports and political figures. These role models are featured at bi-annual crime prevention forums conducted by the team. Other program activities include educational excursions to TKG boot camp, the Medical Examiners Office, and the FIU ropes challenge course.

## Annual Hispanic Family Conference

The Eighth Annual Hispanic Family Conference sponsored by the Department of Human Services was held on Friday, October 22, 2004, at the Radisson Mart Plaza Hotel, from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. This year's theme was "Hispanics Majority or Minority?" The goal of this annual professional event is to address the many social issues facing the Hispanic community in South Florida and explore a variety of alternatives and solutions to these issues. The conference, which was open to the public, benefited social workers, psychologists, mental health professionals and other human services professionals in South Florida.

The daylong conference addressed the Hispanics impact on the political, economic, social and cultural arenas. Thomas Boswell Ph. D., University of Miami, Department of Geography and Regional



Studies was the keynote speaker. The morning workshops included presentations by Ms. Maria Casares, doctoral candidate from Boston College, and Mr. Jorge Mursili from "People for the American Way". Mr. Frank Bolaños, Miami-Dade County Public Schools Board Member was the luncheon speaker. The afternoon session included a presentation by Miami-Dade

County Mayoral Candidate Jimmy L. Morales who spoke about the Hispanics political impact in Miami-Dade County.

The conference's registration fee included lunch. Continuing education credits (CEU's) were provided for psychologists, clinical social workers, marriage and family therapists and mental health counselors.



## CUT OUT DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Florida Attorney General Charlie Crist visited Miami on Thursday, October 7, 2004 to promote "Cut Out Domestic Violence" training seminars that provide hair care professionals with training seminars to become resources to domestic violence victims. The event took place at the Hair Odyssey, 16423 NW 67 Avenue, Miami Lakes.

The Attorney General's Office funds domestic violence trainings, such as this initiative, that provides hair care professionals with training seminars throughout the State of Florida. In Miami Dade County, these trainings are conducted by the Department of Human Services, Advocate for Victims



Program and Safespace Shelters. Topics include the prevalence of domestic violence in Florida, signs of domestic violence, and how to discuss domestic violence programs with clients.

Salon professionals are not being encouraged or required to report suspected cases of abuse, but are a vital resource to victims by being prepared to provide helpful information about available resources in the community. These professionals see their clients regularly, month after month, year after year, and they build relationships with their clientele and can often spot troubling patterns of behavior or a change in their clients.

## THE ANNUAL DOMESTIC VIOLENCE MARCH

***"Enough is enough.... vow not to be a victim anymore.  
Expose domestic violence for what it is – a crime!"***



The Third Annual Domestic Violence March sponsored by the Miami-Dade Department of Human Services and Safespace Foundation, Inc., took place on Sunday, October 24<sup>th</sup>, 2004 from: 4:00-7:00 p.m. at Lummus Park, Ocean Drive & 9<sup>th</sup> Street, Miami Beach. Women were asked to dress in wedding gowns or white attire. This march is in memory of Ms. Gladys Ricart and all victims of domestic violence, is intended to raise awareness and end domestic violence in our multi-cultural community.

Scheduled events include: Placement of candle lights on more than 150 empty chairs representing those in our community that have lost their lives to domestic violence; unveiling of the first-ever **Stop Family Violence** U.S. Postage Stamp. Proceeds from the sale of this stamp will be used to help prevent domestic violence; slide show presentation of domestic violence victims who have been murdered by their abusers; musical performance by acclaimed singer, songwriter, and actress, Maryel Epps; special appearance by International Spanish television host, Tatiana, and special presentations by prominent community leaders throughout South Florida

The Domestic Violence March is made possible with the collaboration of Renaissance at the Gables; Heat Family Outreach, Advocate Program, Inc.; South Florida Federal Executive Board; The Portrait of Empowerment, Inc.; The Greater Miami Chapter of Florida Women in Government; Jorge Luis Lopez Foundation; National Missing Kids Alert; Dade County Alliance Against Domestic Violence; MUJER, Inc.; Office of the State Attorney; Protect America's Children; America's Lifeline Foundation; Hispanic Christian Coalition Against Domestic Violence, Shook, Hardy & Bacon, and The Lodge.

## EDISON NEIGHBORHOOD CENTER HELPS FORMER COLLEAGUE

In a clear example of the County's motto of "Delivering Excellence Every Day" two staff members from the Edison Neighborhood Service Center (NSC) went out of their way to assist a former co-worker in need. As previous employees at the Culmer NSC, Secretary Michelle McKnight and Social Worker Aide Ella Newton were called for assistance when their former co-worker was brought to Culmer. A local resident found the previous Custodial Worker for Culmer wandering the street, appearing disheveled and disoriented.

Michelle and Ella, after seeking permission from their supervisor, rushed to Culmer NSC to see how they could help. As a result of their efforts they were able to calm the gentleman and convince him to seek medical attention. These two ladies made a positive difference in preventing this gentleman from being hurt or taken advantage of. Both Ms. McKnight and Ms. Newton exemplify the essence of helping others in need. Kudos to the both of them!

## American Heart Walk

The Department of Human Services had several teams participate in the American Heart Walk, on Saturday, September 18, at Peacock Park in Coconut Grove. A total of \$2,022.25 was raised by all DHS Teams, and a Countywide grand total of \$17,132.73. DHS Teams and walkers included the Youth and Family Team raising \$590: Jeannette Garcia, Angela Mitchell, Sharon Symonette, Leyani Valladares; the Child Development Services Team, raising \$1,331.25: Janice Delaney, Alvin Delaney, Jr., Angela Mitch, Audrey Braxton, Carolyn Jones, Celestine Maple, Charlotte Shaheed, Ethel Wilcox, Geraldine Stewart, Gloria Simms, Kimberly Davis, Marqulta Forsett, Zalda Alicea; and the Neighborhood Assistance Bureau Team, German Izquierdo, \$100.



## Dominio Tournament at Wynwood NSC

On Friday, November 19, from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m., the DeHostos Senior Center hosted a Domino Tournament in celebration of the "Discovery of Puerto Rico Day" at the Wynwood Neighborhood Service Center. Invited guests include Mayor Manny Diaz and Mayor Carlos Alvarez.

## Service Awards

### 35 Years

Elaine Lhota, OD  
Zaida Soto-Heredia, NAB

### 30 Years

June Brown, ORS  
Lu Narcisse Estime, EDVS  
Blanca Hernandez, CDS  
Sheryl Hopkins, NAB  
Mary Lawson, ORS  
Patricia Randolph, OD  
Iona Richards, EDVS  
Willie Sheffield, OD  
Gloria Simms, CDS

### 25 Years

Joan Carter, NAB  
Isaura Diaz, CDS  
Maria Escobar, NAB  
Gerri Flugrath, OD  
Carmen Morrina, OD

### 20 Years

Miriam Hill, OD

## Retirements

Alberto Bobak, OA, 8/31/04  
Arnold Kelly, ESB, 9/2/04  
Rose Evans, ORS, 9/10/04  
Gloria Panchano, NAB, 9/30/04  
Augusto Gonzalez, ORS, 9/30/04  
Patricia Archie, DPS, 9/30/04  
Alfred Jean Pierre, ESD, 10/29/04  
Elaine Lhota, OD, 10/29/04  
Nora Goller, CDS, 10/31/04  
Teresa Cendan, OA, 12/31/04  
Martha Ruthledge, CDS, 12/31/04  
Zaida Soto-Heredia, NAB, 12/31/04  
Hidalberto Sanchez, EDVS, 12/31/04  
Dean Taylor, Sr., OD, 12/31/04

## ROLE MODEL CRIME PREVENTION FORUM

On Wednesday, August 4, 2004 the Department of Human Services Delinquency Prevention Services, Role Model Program, held its annual Crime Prevention Forum at the Renaissance Ballrooms. The theme of this year's forum was "A Day Without Crime" which focused on addressing career planning and school dropout prevention measures.

The event was attended by over 130 individuals including program participants and community based organizations. Local guest speakers included



Jimmy Elias, who also donated the use of the ballroom; local hip-hop performer Marcy and Sound Mind Entertainment, who also performed live for the audience; former world welter weight boxer Frankie Cruz, Jessica Dorsey "Sister Love" and her youth anti-violence program addressed anger management techniques and conscious awareness exercises.

The speakers received special presentations from grateful staff and luncheon was served for everyone. The role model participants also expressed gratitude to the presenters.

## DHS KENDALL CAMPUS STAFF HAS HEART

Devastating Hurricanes Charles, Frances and Ivan have plagued the State of Florida. Staff of Delinquency Prevention Services (DPS) and some of their co-workers at Psychological Services came to the rescue of fellow Floridians. Immediately after Hurricane Charley hit the West Coast of Florida, Sharon Wheeler, DPS Social Services Supervisor, coordinated with the Cat Network to donate much needed supplies to pets suffering in the affected area. Feeling that wasn't enough, Sharon and her co-workers, Shirley Almeida, DPS Acting Division Director, Juvenile Workers Tanya Coll and Millie Torres, and Administrative Secretary for Psychological Services Elisa McCord pitched in to purchase needed supplies for the human hurricane victims.

Kudos to this caring group for their concern and efforts to help their fellow Floridians during this difficult time.

## Delinquency Prevention Services Client Becomes Local Hero

At South Point Apartments in Florida City, Lestavius Thomas, a participant of Miami Dade County's Department of Human Services Delinquency Prevention Services Division and some friends were recently on their way to an after-school program at Work America. Suddenly, Lestavius noticed smoke coming from an apartment where an elderly female lived. Lestavius stopped and told his friends "we have to do something!" One of his friends tried to enter the apartment, but couldn't do so because of the smoke. Then Lestavius, without concern for his own safety entered the apartment. The smoke was so thick, he couldn't see, but by crawling on the ground, he found the elderly female and escorted her out of the apartment. It seems she was making cornbread on the stove and forgot about it. Lestavius suffered smoke inhalation and was not treated. Yet, he recovered and does not regret rescuing this helpless elderly female.

Lestavius has been a role model to other clients in the program and continues to encourage others his age to go the extra mile to accomplish a task. He is an intelligent, young man, who is mature for his age and is courageous and selfless, as demonstrated by this incident. Kudos to Lestavius for doing the right thing!

## A Positive Story at the CDS Caleb Office

On Wednesday, November 17, the CDS Caleb Office, was referred a child care case that included some unusual circumstances. The client, a grandmother, came into the office on behalf of her daughter, who had recently been incarcerated at a county jail facility. The client wanted to have child care assistance re-determined for her grandchildren, and was told, she would not be able to complete the process for the redo because her daughter was the actual client and that the daughter would need to physically be there to sign and present the necessary documentation to complete the process. Rhawn Davie, Eligibility Supervisor, and Sharon Gordon, Social Worker II, brought the woman, who was getting emotional and visibly upset in the waiting area, into their office. Ms. Gordon, who is a former Clinical Social Worker for the county, settled her down and asked her a series of questions about her personal situation to find out how they could help. They provided information on who to see to get legal power-of-attorney on her daughter's behalf. Furthermore, after the woman revealed that she had recently suffered a stroke and was partially paralyzed on the right side of her body, was not employed and without income, and hadn't been to see a doctor because of no medical coverage since being released from the hospital back in May of this year, Ms. Gordon counseled her on how to go about applying for SSI and Medicaid and strongly suggested that she visit a doctor at the Family Health Center, which is directly across the street from the Caleb Center as soon as possible. Ms. Gordon took a personal concern for the woman's health and welfare and said that she would do a follow-up to contact this woman to see how she was doing.



## Edeline Clermont receives a Pillar Award for Medicine

Each year the Miami Dade County Black Affairs Advisory Board and the Black Heritage Planning Committee hosts the Pillars Awards. Honorees are from several categories. This year's winner in the area of medicine was Edeline Clermont, Department of Human Services, Elderly Disability and Veterans Services Division. During her twenty seven years as a registered nurse, Ms. Clermont has gained a reputation as a strong advocate for women, children and the elderly. She has volunteered countless hours to attend meetings and even uses vacation to attend conferences throughout the United States to advocate.

Ms. Clermont volunteers with Mercy's Hospital Unit and Borinquen Clinic, which provides health care to underserved senior citizens in Little Haiti and Little Havana, and has played a vital role in the Alzheimer's Association through educating others about the needs of our senior citizens. She has been a support group leader for the Greater Miami Chapter of the Alzheimer's Association since 1994, and has served as an advocate for seniors affected by and infected with HIV/AIDS since 1997.

In 2003, Edeline successfully lobbied Miami Dade County Mayor Alex Penelas to establish a Haitian Senior



Center in Little Haiti, and was successful in obtaining a \$350,000 grant to begin and maintain the program, which currently serves at least fifty elderly Haitian American citizens. She was also successful in lobbying the Miami Dade County Board of Commissioners in creating a social worker position in the Care Planning Unit of Elderly Services to serve the Creole speaking population.

Her energy has also been directed at fighting for the rights of immigrants through her work on the plight of Haitian refugees, and her efforts have been aimed at working on the Haitian Refugee Fairness Act, often traveling to Washington, D.C. to lobby Congress on behalf of the thousands of Haitians fleeing to the United States. Ms. Clermont has also advocated for better working conditions, pay and insurance for nursing home workers.

She hosts two cable television programs — "New Issue for a Healthy Community" with two medical professionals and "Living Beyond Limits." She has also appeared on "Haitian Forum" a cable television program focusing on Haitian issues.

Congratulations to Edeline Clermont on her energy and dedication in helping others and for winning the Pillar Award in Medicine.

## GILBRALTAR BANK GIVES BACK TO THE COMMUNITY

Nery Torrent, Vice President, Gibraltar Bank, second from right, has graciously sponsored several Department initiatives in an effort to enhance the quality of life for our needy clients. Among Gibraltar Banks many programs is the affordable housing mortgage program for first time homebuyers in low-and moderate income families which has proven to be extremely successful. Undoubtedly, Gibraltar's joint collaboration with Miami Dade County government and the City of Miami has assisted many families to complete their dream of homeownership.

Thanks Gibraltar for truly caring to assist DHS and low income individuals.

